

To the Members of the Committee on Children,

My name is Olivia Tempesta and I am a Connecticut public school teacher. I am writing today to communicate my opposition to the continuation of virtual learning for the 2021-22 school year, as is being discussed this week with S.B. No. 997 and S.B. No. 2.

The school where I teach has been fully in-person with the option for students to participate remotely since September. Months of experience teaching students in this simultaneous model have illustrated that this method of teaching and learning is neither practical nor sustainable for students or teachers in the long term.

Students pursuing learning from home do not develop the same level of engagement with course content as students who are learning in person. Likewise, our students who attend school remotely receive less social emotional engagement and activity with their in-person classmates, which further impacts their connection to and investment in their school community. It must not be overlooked that these challenges disproportionately impact our students who require additional learning support, students of working class families and students of color.

Teachers are already tasked with the challenge of helping students unpack the trauma that they have experienced over the past year of living through a global pandemic, in addition to delivering academic content and ensuring that every student receives the support they need to succeed in school. Providing the same support to students who are remote adds a dual layer of planning, preparation, and delivery that has taken a devastating toll on teachers this year.

Teacher attrition rates have been on the rise in our country long prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and I suspect that this will only worsen if we are not given representation regarding the urgent school policy matters at hand. I urge you to recognize that it is not sustainable for teachers to continue to prepare and teach in person and remotely simultaneously. Please demonstrate your support for Connecticut teachers and students this week by opposing the continuation of virtual learning in our schools next year.

Sincerely,
Olivia Tempesta